



9/11 Never Forget Memorial

ASU West Campus

Friday, September 11, 2009

Thank you, Michael.

And, thanks to all of you for allowing me to be a part of this special remembrance of September 11th, 2001.

I am honored to share this morning with you as we remember the souls lost, the lives changed, and how our state and nation were forever altered.

The years have allowed us time to reflect upon the meaning of that terrible day -- and maybe even its purpose.

For example -- for the writer, Peggy Noonan, the sounds of the day will live long in our history, especially the spontaneous messages of love that were sent by the victims, moments before they perished.

For Ms. Noonan, there were voices that came from within the buildings and within the planes -- the phone calls and messages left on answering machines, all the last things said to whoever was home and picked up the phone.

There was Todd Beamer of United 93 praying on the phone with a woman he'd never met before, a Verizon Airfone supervisor.

She said later that his tone was calm. It seemed as if they were "old friends," she later wrote. They said the Lord's Prayer together. Then he said "Let's roll."

Thirty-one-year-old Melissa Harrington, a California-based trade consultant at a meeting in the World Trade Center, called her father to say she loved him.

Minutes later she left a message on the answering machine as her new husband slept in their San Francisco home. "Sean, it's me, she said. "I just wanted to let you know, I love you."

These are wonderful markers for us as we move through our daily lives, as time moves us further away from the tragedies of that day.

They are sentiments of some things extraordinary, some things enduring – infinite love, infinite hope, yes, even the promise of redemption.

For me, one special symbol of September 11th is something you can find at the northeast corner of New York City's Van Cortlandt Park.

It's a pear tree.

It has a deep bark, and thriving branches.

On September 11, 2001, the tree was growing in comfort near the World Trade Center.

Its oval leaves were starting to turn with brilliant colors -- yellow and orange; red and pink; purple and bronze.

It was not far from ground zero.

When salvage efforts began, the tree was uncovered.

Ash was removed, and rescuers could see that the pear tree's crown had been blown off, its once robust branches had been reduced to stumps.

Still, there was hope the tree could be saved.

So, on November 11, 2001, the eight-foot tree was moved to Van Cortlandt Park.

Slowly -- ever so slowly -- it began to show signs of life.

A bud here, a green sprout there.

Today, it is in full white flower, and, is destined to be moved in two years to the plaza of the World Trade Center memorial, where it will join other trees being readied for planting there.

It is a symbol of an incomprehensible force, not unlike the echoing affections planted forever in our hearts on September 11th.

The tree is alive, as is our country.

Its roots deep, its branches high, its vibrancy still unfolding.

Surely it is nourished in part by an invisible hand, one that cares for the symbol it nurtures, one that protects the sounds of the voices that Peggy Noonan hears.

And -- just as surely -- it was that same hand that helped John Newton pen the words of Amazing Grace:

"Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
"I have already come;
"Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
"And grace will lead me home."

Thank you.

And, thank you, again, for the chance to be with you on this day.

God bless you. God bless Arizona, and may God bless the United States of America.